



United States Special Operations Forces

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Guidance on Ethics



For 31 years, U.S. special operations forces have conducted thousands of missions, operating jointly around the globe. Together – Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines – we conduct the most sensitive missions in defense of our country. To this end, the American people have entrusted us with the Nation’s security and the lives of their sons and daughters, their greatest treasure.

For this reason, special operations forces are expected to operate with the highest standards of ethics and honor. Trustworthiness and accountability are foundational to conducting our nation’s most complex and high risk operations – this ethos is at the core of our lethality and readiness, and essential to strengthening alliances. We will hold ourselves and each other accountable to these high standards every day because lives are on the line.

Remain vigilant. Do not allow a sense of personal entitlement or the desire for privilege or benefit to cloud your judgment. As Secretary Mattis has said, “play the ethical midfield.” Do not run the ethical sidelines where one misstep will put you out of bounds.

Small actions can have large impacts, particularly when the results become highly visible on the national and international stage. We routinely operate around the world in environments where the exposure and temptations to be influenced by local norms are a reality. Never give the American people or our allies cause to doubt our will to execute at the highest standards of tactical and moral excellence.

We train for and operate in dynamic, complex and ambiguous environments. You are empowered and trusted. When tough calls need to be made, do your best in the light of our American values. You have consistently proven that your empowerment and trust is warranted. When we fall short, take thorough and effective corrective action on behavior that does not meet with DoD, Service or USSOCOM standards.

Continue to serve with honor and integrity, on and off the battlefield.

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